DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 135 CS 208 266

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TITLE Agency Researchers' Perception of the Users and Uses of Copy Research.
PUB DATE Aug 84
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (67th, Gainesville, FL, August 5-8, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; Creative Expression; Mass Media Effects; *Media Research; Use Studies
IDENTIFIERS *Advertising Copywriting

ABSTRACT

A survey of 30 advertising agency researchers sought to determine (1) whether there are differences between agency researchers' perception of who benefits most from copy research and who should benefit most, and (2) whether there are differences between their perception of how copy research is used and how it should be used. Consistent with earlier studies, the results of the survey indicated that advertising creators still benefit the least from copy research when in fact they should benefit the most. Subjects also indicated that copy research is still used too frequently as a "go/no go" report card for determining whether to run a particular advertisement, when it should be used to provide creative guidance for advertising copy developers. (Tables of data are appended.) (HTH)

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AGENCY RESEARCHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE USERS AND USES OF COPY RESEARCH

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Abstract

AGENCY RESEARCHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE USERS AND USES OF COPY RESEARCH

The role of copy research in advertising planning remains a dilemma. This paper reports the results of a survey which was undertaken to determine whether there are differences between agency researchers' perception of the users and uses of copy research. Consistent with Shirley Young's earlier study, the survey found that (1) creatives still benefit the least from copy research when they should benefit the most and (2) copy research is still used too frequently as a "go/no go" report card for determining whether or not to run a particular ad when it should be used to provide creative guidance.

AGENCY RESEARCHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE USERS AND USES OF COPY RESEARCH

One of the most important studies on advertising copy research was presented before the 1977 Advertising Research Foundation conference by Shirley Young (1977). The study, sponsored by the American Association of Advertising Agencies, surveyed 47 corporate (client) research directors, 30 agency research directors, and 50 agency creative directors, and was designed to determine whether they felt that copy research practices adequately identified effective copy. Four specific questions were studied:

(1) How satisfied are advertisers and agencies with copy research?

(2) What types of measures are used to test copy effectiveness?

(3) Who benefits most and least from copy research?

(4) How is (should be) copy research used in advertising decision making?

Collectively, the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with copy research, although there were some differences between the three groups. On a six-point satisfaction scale, 22% indicated high satisfaction with copy research; 25% indicated moderate satisfaction; and 53% indicated low satisfaction.

The respondents indicated that immediate recall (i.e., playback) was the most frequently used measure (78%). This measure was followed by day-after-recall (49%), attitude toward ad (30%), global attitude change (27%), and attitude toward specific brand attributes (12%). A later survey of 42 client and 27 agency research directors reported similar results. The study, conducted by Ostlund, Clancy, and Sapra (1980), reported that 42% of the respondents used on-air recall measures

and 32% used attitude change measures. Taken together, the studies reveal that forms of recall and attitude change are the two most frequently used measures by large advertisers and agencies.

By a wide margin, the respondents indicated that creatives benefit the least (48%) and brand managers the most from copy research (61%). However, when asked who should benefit, the respondents indicated that creatives should benefit the most (70%), followed by brand managers (42%) and account managers (20%). This clearly implies that all three groups recognize that copy research should provide guidance to the people who create the advertising.

When asked how copy research is used, the respondents indicated that it is primarily used to serve the client's desire for "magic numbers." Fifty-one percent of the respondents indicated that copy research serves as a "go/"no go" report card about whether or not to go with an ad and 34% indicated that it serves as "the primary decision tool." The respondents indicated that copy research is infrequently used to "provide creative guidance" (22%) or to "aid in creative judgement" (22%). However, when asked how copy research should be used, only 18% indicated as a "go/"no go" report card and only 22% as "the primary decision tool," while 74% indicated that it should be used "to provide creative guidance" and 77% indicated that it should be used to aid creative judgement. The implication is that there is a wide gap between how copy research is used and should be used, and that the emphasis is on "magic numbers" when it should be on diagnostic values.

From the results, Young (1977:9-12) made four recommendations to advertising practitioners:

(1) There should be a range of copy research measures used to test copy effectiveness, and these measures should be matched to specific copy problems.

(2) Multiple measures, taken together, rather than a single measures should be used to test copy effectiveness.

(3) Copy research should be primarily designed to help the creative people, although it is the responsibility of the creative, client and agency research people working together.

(4) Copy research should be designed to provide creative guidance on how to creative more effective advertising, and evaluated on diagnostic values within the context of total knowledge about copy effectiveness.

Building upon Young's work, this article reports a survey of how larger agency researchers perceive the users and uses of copy research. The purpose of the survey was two-fold: (1) to determine whether there are differences between agency researchers' perception of who benefits most from copy research and who should benefit most and (2) to determine whether there are differences between their perception of how copy research is used and how it should be used. Considering that over half a decade has passed since Young's report, another look at agency researchers' perception of the practice and ideal of copy research would seem worthwhile.

METHOD

Respondents

The sampling frame of agency researchers was Advertising Age's 1982 listing of the leading national advertising agencies (Advertising Age, March 18, 1982). Ninety-four researchers from the agency listing (i.e., agencies with a billing over five million dollars) were selected from the Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies (July 1982). The researchers were selected on the criterion of apparent responsibility (i.e., title) for an agency's copy research efforts.

A cover letter, as well as the questionnaire and a postage-paid return envelope, were mailed to the ninety-four researchers. The cover letter

explained the purpose of the survey and included a telephone number in the event that a researcher had any further questions regarding the survey.

Thirty useable questionnaires were returned, yielding the same number of agency researchers surveyed by Young. No follow-up procedures were used in an effort to increase the response rate because of the lack of further funding.

Measures

Perceptual differences in who benefits most from copy research versus who should benefit were measured by a series of five-point Likert scales. Five copy research users were evaluated: client brand managers, agency account managers, agency creative people, client research managers, and agency research managers. Two forms of the scales were constructed, with one form asking "who benefits" and the other form asking "who should benefit." The scale values ranged from "extremely beneficial" to "of no benefit," and were coded so that the value of "five" corresponded to the most positive perception and the value of "one" to the most negative.

Perceptual differences in how copy research is used versus how it should be used were also measured by a series of five-point Likert scales. The uses evaluated were: "used as a 'go/'no go' report card to determine which ad to use;" "used to help sell a point of view;" "used to provide creative guidance by providing detailed information about various dimensions of an ad;" "used as the primary decision criterion;" and "used as an aid to professional judgement about an ad." Two forms of the scales were constructed, with one asking "how copy research is used" and the other asking "how it should be used." The scale values ranged from "extremely important" to "of no importance," and were coded so that the value of "five" corresponded to the most positive perception and the value of "one" to the most negative.

RESULTS

Users of Copy Research

Table 1 presents the mean scores of the agency researchers' perception of which users benefit versus should benefit from copy research. Only one statistically significant difference was found among the user groups. The significant difference occurred in the agency creative group. The mean score for the "who benefits" scale was 3.11 and 4.34 for the "who should benefit" scale, indicating by the direction of the response that copy research is perceived as moderately beneficial to creatives when it should be very beneficial.

While no statistical tests were performed, visual inspection of the rank-order distribution of the means by the "who benefits" versus "who should benefit" scales supports the above finding. Client brand managers were perceived to benefit the most (3.98) from copy research, while agency creatives were perceived to benefit the least (3.11) when they should benefit the most (4.34).

The frequency distribution of the response by scale values also supports the finding. In response to the "who benefits" scale, seventy-seven percent of the researchers indicated that copy research is extremely or very beneficial to client brand managers; twenty-three percent indicated that it is moderately beneficial; and none indicated that it is of little or no benefit. In contrast, only thirty-percent of the researchers indicated that copy research is extremely or very beneficial to creatives; fifty-percent indicated that it is moderately beneficial; and twenty-percent indicated that it is of little or no benefit.

While little response change to the "who should benefit" scale was detected regarding client brand managers, considerable change occurred regarding agency creatives. Eighty-eight percent of the researchers indicated that copy research should be extremely or very beneficial to creatives; twelve percent indicated that it should be moderately beneficial; and none indicated that it should be

of little or no benefit. The only noteable change regarding client brand managers was that eight percent of the researchers indicated that copy research should be of little or no benefit.

Uses of Copy Research

Table 2 presents the mean scores of the agency researchers' perception of how copy research is used versus how it should be used. Of the five uses, four exhibited statistically significant mean differences between the practice and ideal of copy research utilization.

Two of the uses, "to help sell a point of view" and "to provide creative guidance," were significantly different at the .01 level. Mean scores for the "to help sell a point of view" use ranged from 3.02 for the "is used" scale to 2.45 for the "should be used" scale. Mean scores for the "to provide creative guidance" use ranged from 3.72 for the "is used" scale to 4.11 for "should be used" scale. The direction of the response for the two uses indicates that the perception is that copy research should be used less as evidence for supporting personal opinion about ads, while used more to provide creative guidance to the people who create the ads.

The other two uses, "as a go/no go report card" and "as the primary decision criterion," were significantly different at the .05 level rather than the .01 level. Mean scores for the "go/no go report card" use ranged from 3.75 for the "is used" scale to 3.34 for the "should be used" scale. Mean scores for the "as the primary decision criterion" ranged from 2.84 for the "is used" scale to 2.43 for the "should be used" scale. The direction of the response for both uses indicate that the perception is that copy research should be used less as as "go/no go" criterion in deciding which ad to run and even less as the primary decision criterion.

The non-significant difference occurred for the "as an aid to professional judgement" use. Response to the two scales indicate that the perception is that copy research is an important supplement to professional judgement and is incorporated in actual practice.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATION

In her original report, Young (1977:8) warned "that the right users -- the creative people -- are not being served and that the copy testing is not being used for the right purposes -- that is, to provide guidance on how to provide more effective copy within the context of a body of research."

A comparison of the results of the present study with Young's indicates that not much has changed regarding the users and users of copy research -- at least as seen by thirty agency researchers. Although years have past since Young recommended to the advertising industry that copy research be primarily designed to provide guidance to creatives on how to make ads more effective, there remains a gap between the practice and ideal of copy research. As seen by agency researchers, (1) creatives still benefit the least from copy research when they should benefit the most and (2) copy research is still used too frequently as a "go/no go" report card for determining whether or not to run a particular ad when it should be used to provide creative guidance. Taken together, the implication remains: "More emphasis should be placed on the diagnostic dimensions of copy research and less on what Young calls the "magic number" aspects.

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TABLE I

Who Benefits or Should Benefit from Copy Research

User	Who Benefits	Who Should Benefi.	T	P
client brand managers	3.98 (.73)	3.77 (.86)	1.35	ns
agency account managers	3.88 (.69)	3.98 (.82)	.63	ns
agency creative people	3.11 (.81)	4.34 (.86)	8.26	.01
client research managers	3.66 (.91)	3.70 (.90)	.31	ns
agency research managers	3.65 (.91)	3.84 (.91)	1.31	ns

TABLE 2

How Copy Research Is Used or Should Be Used

Uses	Is Used	Should Be Used	T	P
"as a "go/"no go" report card"	3.75 (.94)	3.34 (.91)	2.41	.05
"to help sell a point of view"	3.02 (1.05)	2.45 (1.11)	3.87	.01
"to provide creative guidance"	3.72 (1.02)	4.11 (1.04)	2.58	.01
"as the primary decision criterion"	2.84 (1.20)	2.43 (.95)	2.41	.05
"as an aid to professional judgement"	3.93 (.93)	4.27 (.95)	1.95	ns